

# **DC STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**Wednesday, June 16, 2010**

**5:30 p.m.**

**441 4th Street, NW, Washington, DC**

Good evening. My name is Molly Whalen, I am currently serving as Chair of the State Advisory Panel for Special Education in the District; and I am a parent two children with special needs and my family resides in DC.

During my 8+ years experience with the DC special education system, I have experienced many lows and a few "mediums". However, one of the best steps I believe our city has taken was the establishment and funding to create a State Education Agency – OSSE, a necessary step towards improvement, especially in the critical arena of our city's special education system.

On behalf of parents such as myself, I encourage the continued support of OSSE's Department of Special Education, which is deeply committed to the transformation of special education within the District and is working at a fast pace on multiple fronts. Evidence of the team's efforts can be seen in the following overview of key accomplishments:

## **Monitoring Systems**

OSSE has introduced a New State Monitoring Framework, and just as importantly provide training and technical assistance on this framework to all LEAs and Early Intervention Providers Annually. They have begun to conduct On-site Monitoring to Identify Noncompliance for Part B and Part C and Issued Letters of Findings for Identified Noncompliance. They have developed a Nonpublic Monitoring Tool in Partnership with Key Child Serving agencies.

## **Data Systems**

OSSE has developed a new State Special Education Data System (SEDS) with Input from LEAs and provided ongoing training on the system and its components.

## **Training and Technical Assistance**

OSSE has created comprehensive trainings for LEAs and stakeholders and collaborated with Nationally Recognized Experts to Design the District's Response to Intervention (RTI) Pilot. The SAP has been increasingly pleased and impressed with the wide-array of training efforts and programs put on by the OSSE Training & Technical Assistance Unit, led by Chandra Williams. We have heard from teachers and administrators from all the LEAs great praise for these trainings and professional development. The current challenge is getting the word out to more front line teachers and staff in DCPS and the public charters.

## **Foundational Policies and Procedures**

At the SAP we encouraged OSSE's Department of Special Education to develop and issue the city's first policy on Inclusion 18 months ago, and since then they have developed and issued a series of Foundational Policies and Guidance to Ensure Compliance and Improve Practice, including:

- Placement Oversight Policy and Procedure (v.1 and v.2)
- Least Restrictive Environment and Inclusion
- Guidance on Prohibition of Discrimination Against Children with Disabilities
- Charter Regulations (3019)
- State Complaints Procedures
- ChildFind
- Early Childhood Transition
- Secondary Transition
- Related Services
- Initial Evaluation/Re-evaluation

Additionally, the DSE has put energies into collaborations with DYRS, CFSA, and DMH to Ensure Coordination and Problem Solving for Multi-Systems Involved Children.

## **Community and Parent Outreach**

OSSE staff are committed to involving the stakeholders in our special education community – and this includes providers, teachers, and parents. They have met Regularly with State Special Education Advisory Groups (Part B and C) to Seek Input on Key Decisions; Facilitate LEA, Community, and Parent Involvement on Draft Policies; have established Quarterly LEA Special Education Meetings to Provide Updates and Solicit Feedback and Expanded Webpage to Include a Link for Parent and Community Resources.

However, even with this positive movement, the area of parent & community outreach continues to be a challenge and concern. The SAP urges OSSE to develop more methods of communication and outreach to the special education stakeholders – our system continues to be challenged by the lack of understanding of parental and student rights and system knowledge. Too many parents still do not know the various options for special education in our city – and the various arms of communication are too scattered and sporadic. In addition, the “brand” of DC special education needs to change – too many parents still do not trust DC special education.

As the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) enters its third year as the SEA, it is apparent that this change in governance structure allows for a stronger and more effective policy formulation and true oversight role for the OSSE. In our 2009 SAP Annual Report to the

Mayor and the Council, the SAP urged the city leadership to continue to strengthen the OSSE and provide the necessary fiscal resources to this agency to allow for continued growth, education reform and regulation. Our 2010 SAP Annual Report is due in the next few weeks; while we have seen continual growth and advancement over the years, especially in monitoring, policy, and transportation – we have put our focuses again at the continued needs of: monitoring, parent communication and education, transition and placement concerns, and multi-systems and agency coordination. In addition, we are advising on the concern that OSSE special education needs to “finish the job” – we have begun to put the pieces in place, however, we can not slow down – where we have begun inclusion – are we continuing with training, how do we tackle the LRE concerns unique to our city, how do we get more schools at a higher level of quality special education – not just a few pilots. How are we tackling major issues such as the growing prevalence of autism?

Because of this great need to “finish the job,” I would be remiss if I did not applaud and gratefully thank the dedicated staff members at OSSE Dept of Special Education – they have worked tirelessly to create the scaffolding of this new structure and the work is far from over – but they have certainly left a tremendous mark to date, Tami Lewis, Amy Maisterra, Liz Morse, Desiree Brown, Chandra Williams, Bill Knudson and Katterina Bravo, to name only a few.

I welcome any questions you may have, and thank you for this opportunity to provide comments.

